

March 28, 2021

4. Jesus Clears the Temple

Matthew 21:12-16

Imagine being an Israelite pilgrim, journeying to Jerusalem to mark the Passover that day. As you get close to the city, you are swept up in a parade of sorts. The group of pilgrims coalesces around a man on a donkey, and before you know it, it's like a royal procession. The road is strewn with cloaks and tree branches, a sign of honor for this—this Son of David!? You hear them shout “Hosanna!” and realize that many believe this man to be the Messiah.

As the crowd converges on the temple, you are thrilled to be there to perform your sacrifice at the same time as this Jesus. You have heard rumors of his teachings and miracles; perhaps today you will witness it yourself! Suddenly, the tone of the shouting has changed. What was celebratory and triumphant has turned angry and indignant. You peer through the crowd to see what is happening and can hardly believe your eyes. Jesus is making quite a scene! He has turned over the money changers' tables, spreading coins everywhere. He is driving out those who are selling animals for sacrifice and the animals with them.

What is the meaning of this? This mess, this disruption! What are you to do? You have journeyed far to make your Passover offering! You had prepared your coins to exchange so you can purchase a spotless lamb acceptable for the sacrifice. Now what!? How are you to carry out your worship? Everything you came expecting, depending on, has been taken away in this disturbing situation caused by this Jesus!

As I read of Jesus overturning the tables in the temple and driving out those who were doing business there, I can't help but think about how our ways of worship have been overturned as the pandemic has driven us away from our physical gatherings. “Business as usual” for the church has been interrupted. Just like the imaginary Passover pilgrim, we are left asking, “Now what?” Do we simply wait for the dust to settle, for the disruption to pass, and then resume where we left off? Or is there an opportunity here for us to evaluate and consider the routines and rituals of our worship, assessing what honors God and provides welcome for worshipers.

Rev. Erik Samuelson, in “The Death of Sunday Worship,” says:

Sometimes we seem more interested in merely restoring what we've lost, rather than letting die what needs to die. But if we dare to embrace the grief of loss, our communities can emerge not just resuscitated, but resurrected. As we return to

our buildings again for gatherings, we have the opportunity (if we are open to it) to let Sunday worship die altogether—not *gathering for worship*, but our tendency to worship what we do on Sunday itself!¹

The Jewish people could not fathom the transformation of worship that Jesus was initiating with the temple cleansing. Their patterns of sacrifice to connect with the holy would become obsolete in the consummate sacrifice of Jesus, tearing the curtain in the temple and ushering in new ways of participating in the life and purpose of the one true God. While the transition was no doubt filled with chaos and confusion, the miracle of resurrection, accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, sustained and transformed the new community of God worshipers into a vibrant church of Christ.

Perhaps this time of pandemic offers us a similar opportunity? “How might God be calling your congregation through the death of Sunday worship into new life as the resurrected body of Christ?”²

—Rachel Wallace

Wallace.rae@gmail.com



Rachel Wallace loves Jesus and is seeking to follow him with her husband and two kids in rural Saskatchewan where she pastors Eigenheim Mennonite Church. Her happy place is an armchair with a strong cup of coffee and a furry friend on her lap.

Resources for this session

***Salt & Light* Videos**

Elizabeth Soto Albrecht is the presenter for unit 1, God’s Holy People. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. They are available on [MennoMedia’s YouTube channel](#).

A ***Salt & Light* Reproducible** is available for use with this session, found at www.MennoMedia.org/SL.

1. Samuelson, Erik. “The Death of Sunday Worship,” Vibrant Faith Catalyst, <https://vibrant-faith-catalyst.mn.co/posts/the-death-of-sunday-worship>

2. Samuelson.